

Why Are There No Statistics on Internal Migration in Azerbaijan?

written by Rovshan Aghayev

Azerbaijan has failed to build a statistical database on the internal migration of the population, that is, on the movement of people through various administrative territorial units within the nation for temporary or permanent dwelling purposes. However, internal migration flows are recorded according to existing legal requirements by law enforcement agencies for the purposes of tracking the population. According to Article 10 of the [Law](#) of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Registration at the Place of Residence and Sojourn," if a national wants to live temporarily for a period of more than 60 days outside of his/her official place of residence, he/she must fill out and submit an application form to the relevant state body within 7 days from the moment when he/she moves to the temporary place of residence.

In terms of professional planning of economic development, especially the balanced regional development of public transportation loads, and reliable forecasting, statistical data on internal migration flows should be collected and regularly updated. Especially in places like Azerbaijan, where the vast majority of the population is concentrated in a small geographical area, the availability of internal migration statistics is extremely important. Not only among researchers specializing in the field of regional development, but even among people who live their daily lives, many believe that the regions of the country have been depopulated, and that almost half of the country has relocated to the capital of Baku and its adjacent areas, or to be more precise, in Baku and Sumgait cities, called *Greater Baku*, as well as the Absheron district.

In all likelihood, law enforcement authorities, at the very least, have accurate data on the geographical distribution of the population, and the central government knows the real picture of internal migration. However, official institutions have continuously kept silent during public discussions of the subject. It is not difficult to guess the reason for the government's opaque conduct and silence regarding internal migration. One of the success stories of the last 20 years, which the government has wanted to build on, is the billions of manats, from oil money, successfully invested in regional development, as well as the social, transportation, and communication infrastructure created through these investments. If official statistics reflecting the reality of internal migration are available, and the government acknowledges that a rapid migration from the region to the capital has continued during the 20 years of implementation of four regional development programs, how and which arguments will the government forward to defend its ineffective regional policy?

In this case, no matter to what extent society knows the reality, if there is no official statistical recognition, there is no need for the government to defend its policies. However, it is not only necessary for the government to statistically monitor internal migration flows for the effective organization of public transport, but also this process produces socio-cultural and ecological effects in the country, and reliable statistics are needed for researchers in the field to see the real picture and ascertain the importance of the issue. Let's look at a simple example: if 50% of a country's population is concentrated in 5% of its geographical area, environmental disaster will occur in that area in the medium and long term if proper measures are not taken. Another example: if the active and dynamic part of the population from the regions flows to the capital, the development of the regions weakens significantly. That is because, the depopulation of rural regions is not related to the

production, migrants are also consumers, and as internal migration expands, regions lose their advantages as markets.

It is clear that Azerbaijan does not keep and publish official statistics on internal migration. Is it possible to determine the real level of settlement in Baku and adjacent areas based on some alternative sources or socio-economic indicators?

Alternative indicators of the extent of internal migration

Some analysts of internal migration suggest that the level of real population in a specific area might be determined based on the level of consumption of utility services. This is one possible approach that allows observers to have a true picture of the internal migration situation, but it does not allow for precise data. For example, according to the latest energy balance prepared by the State Statistics Committee, households across the country in 2020 consumed about 4 billion cubic meters of [natural gas](#) and 7 billion kilowatt hours of [electricity](#). Data from the Baku City Statistics Department show that the population of Baku consumed 1,4 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 3 billion kilowatt hours of [electricity](#).

As can be seen from the official data, Baku accounts for 43% of the country's natural gas consumption, if we take the purely population consumption. According to data from the Statistics Department, the number of people officially registered in Baku (2,3 million) remains just below 23% of the country's population (10,1 million people). Based on the share of natural gas and electricity consumption, more people live in the capital than are official registered, but it is impossible to provide a precise number. For example, methodological and statistical obstacles prevent the claim that the capital's population accounts for 42% or 35% of the total population in proportion to the 43% in gas consumption or 35% in electricity consumption. First of all, there are differences in the level of gasification by region of the

country: while almost all apartments in Baku are gasified, this indicator is lower in a number of regions. At the same time, in contrast to the regions, a significant part of the population in Baku lives in multi-story buildings, and heating of apartments in such buildings requires less natural gas consumption than in houses.

In contrast to natural gas supply, all apartments in the regions, with very few exceptions, have electricity, and the level of this indicator can create a more realistic picture of settlement. But there are 2 problems related to this indicator: 1) Both the population's relatively high financial situation, and the milder climate, especially compared to mountainous regions, increase the possibility of higher per capita electricity consumption in the capital; 2) Rarer power outages in Baku compared to the regions lead to higher energy consumption in the capital.

But it is impossible to make a precise calculation because there are no publicly available official statistics on the energy consumption of the population in the regions outside Baku. Even the number of subscribers in the *utility consumption* approach can distort the picture. For example, during the preparation of this article, according to the information we obtained from official structures through unofficial channels, Baku alone accounts for approximately 36% or 950.000 of subscribers to the electricity grid out of a total 2,6 million. If Sumgait and Absheron are taken into account, this indicator for Greater Baku is around 42% of total subscribers. But we cannot know how many family members per subscriber in the regions and Baku. For example, there may be an average of 3 people per 1 subscriber in the capital, and 5 people in the regions. In all cases, both the number of subscribers and the level of consumption of services show that the real population level in the capital is much higher than the officially registered population. One example can help illustrate the population missed by looking only at gas subscribers: according to unofficial information from

informants within official bodies, the natural gas subscribers in the Absheron district number 153 thousand, which is approximately 4% (5 thousand) more than those in 3 districts of Baku combined—Garadagh, Narimanov and Sabail. However, according to [official statistics](#), only 215 thousand people live in Absheron, while almost twice as many—411 thousand people—live in the said districts. This fact indicates that the real population of Absheron, together with unregistered residents, is almost 2 times more than that suggested by our above estimate of number of household members per subscriber.

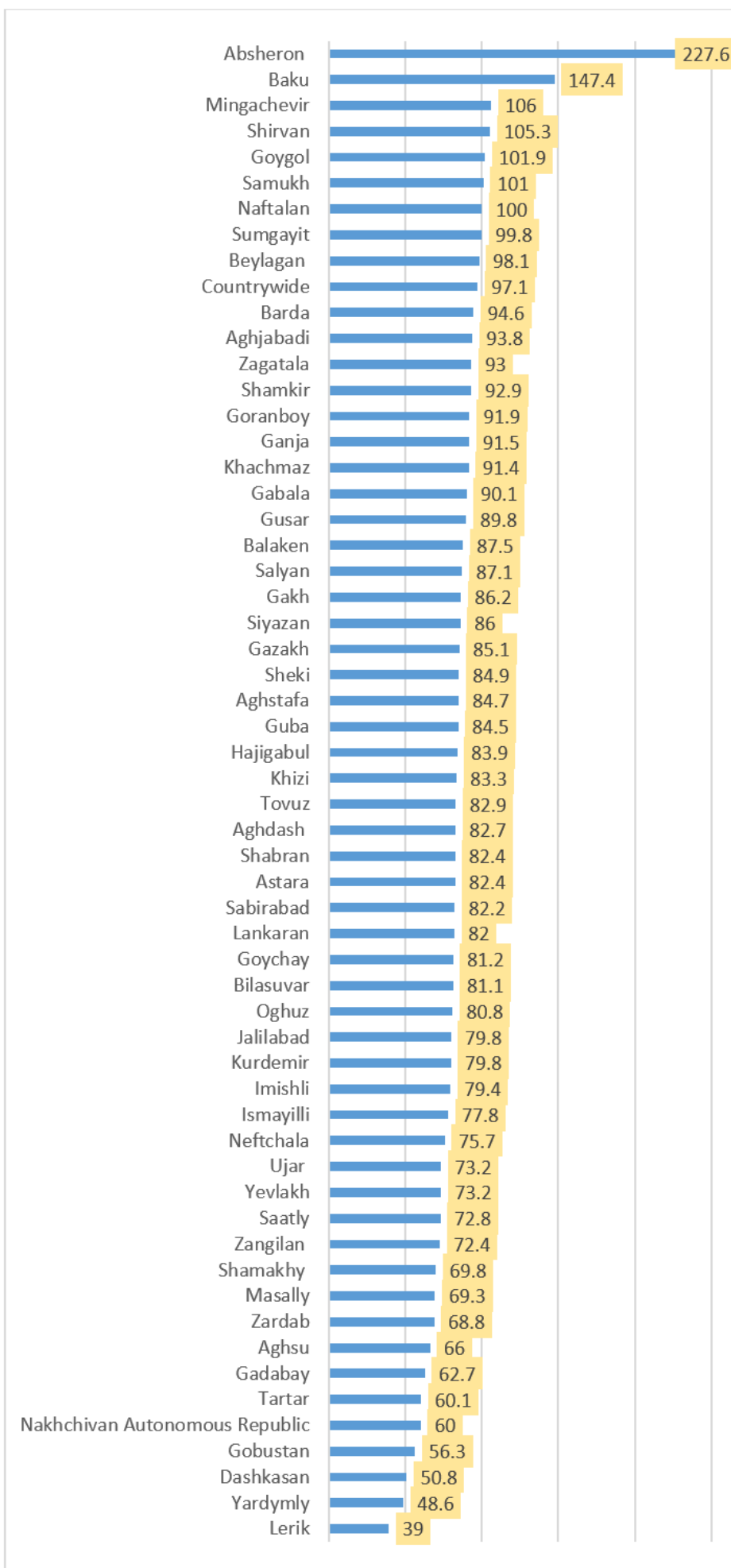
Among publicly available statistical indicators, only the number of secondary school students can be considered a more reliable alternative to those discussed in terms of the real scale of internal migration by region. At least formally, almost 97-98% of children aged 6-17 years are either registered or enrolled as pupils in schools in their actual (not official) place of residence. As part of this study, the number of 6-17-year-old (school-age) population was calculated separately for each region and city based on socio-economic [indicators](#) of the regions released by the State Statistics Committee. Official statistical data show that the percentage of 6-17-year-old children in the total population deviates from our above calculated indicator (17,1%) for the country by 15-20%. This difference between regions with outlier low and high indicators is around 35%. For example, while our calculated indicator is 17,1% on average across the country, the highest indicator was recorded in Yardymly (20%), and the lowest in Absheron (15%).

By contrast, sharp differences are observed in the net enrollment ratio of pupils, and sharp deviations by region are a sign of the presence of informal internal migration. The net enrollment ratio in secondary education is the ratio of the number of pupils actually receiving education in the area to the officially registered population aged 6-17 years. One argument against this indicator is that a subset of pupils discontinues their studies in general education schools after

9 years of education. However, an analysis of the database provided by the State Examination Center shows that every year, on average, a maximum of 1,5-2% of all secondary school students aged 6-17 years, and a maximum of 0,3% of the general population either are enrolled in secondary specialized and vocational education, or generally leave secondary schools with an incomplete secondary education. This is also proven by the figure on the level of involvement of children aged 6-17 years in secondary education across the country. Thus, in 2021, approximately 97% of the 1.730.000 children aged 6-17 years in the country, or 1,691 million were enrolled in general education schools (children with physical disabilities in that age group are not included here). As can be seen, because the ratio of those who leave secondary school after 9 years to the total population and pupils is very small, the indicator of the ratio of the 6-17-year-old population to officially registered pupils is reliable.

The figure below presents the net enrollment ratio for secondary education by region, and based on these indicators, it is possible to determine the direction of internal migration flows.

Ratio of officially registered high school students to the 6-17-year-old population by region, %



As can be seen from the data presented, the difference between Lerik, which has the lowest indicator, and Absheron, which has the highest indicator, is almost 6 times. The indicator for Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is 40% lower than the national average. The simplest explanation of this indicator is that the higher the ratio of 6-17-year-olds actually enrolled in secondary schools to the officially registered 6-17-year-old population, the higher the informal settlement in the area. A higher index (more than 100) indicates that the area is highly populated by unofficial internal migrants, and a lower one (especially below 90) indicates that migration from the area has occurred. This approach does not work for the territories newly liberated after the Second Karabakh War.

With rough calculations, the net enrollment ratio in secondary education in the Absheron district is about 2,5 times higher than the national average, indicating that the number of real residents in the district is at least 2 times higher than the officially registered population or about 216 thousand people. Recent research on the density of secondary school students in Absheron conducted by mass media outlets also gives reason to suspect that the real level of settlement within the district is quite high. One of those [studies](#) revealed that although school number 2 in Khirdalan, the administrative center of Absheron district, has 1.380 pupils, that number is probably around [4,5 times higher](#) because in actuality there are 6.177 pupils in the school. Unlike Absheron, the indicator for Nakhchivan is about 35% less than the national average, thus suggesting that at least 120-140 thousand out of about 470 thousand of the region's population live elsewhere in the country as internal migrants.^{[\[1\]](#)}

Notes and references:

^{[\[1\]](#)} [Information](#) on the number of high school students by region was obtained from the State Statistics Committee.